

1382-99 THEY LACS THE SPIRIT
OF MARTYRDOM 319

churches at the head of riotous mobs. The Bishop of Lincoln's officers dared not enter the gates. Northampton had chosen a religion of its own. It would be interesting to know whether Fox was an ancestor of the martyrologist or the Quaker.¹

Under such auspices in village and town, these preachers, whose enthusiasm and energy even their foes did not deny, produced an extraordinary effect. According to the Leicester monk, every second man in those parts was a Lollard. This must not be treated as a statistical fact, but only as a strong expression. Half the population had perhaps been impressed more or less favourably by some of Wyclif's doctrines, but as was proved when the Archbishop visited the diocese, few were ready to break definitely with the Church authorities. There are many shades of opinion and degrees of persuasion, and it is hard to believe that in any countryside half the inhabitants were pledged to Lollardy.

The heretics had done well to gain for themselves so good a position, but they still lacked one quality without which such a cause as theirs could never triumph. They were not ready to be martyrs. The good impression they had made on the public mind would at this point have been greatly strengthened, if they had shown that unbending spirit, that joyful defiance of death, that power almost superhuman of enduring torture, by which their successors in the end won the battle against authority. But it was not till the second generation of Lollards that Sawtre showed the way for Protestants to die. Wycliffe's immediate followers, though able and zealous missionaries, were not perhaps such fine men as their master or as their successors. But physical fear was not the sole reason of their submission to the episcopal tribunals. It may well be that they dreaded to appear as avowed heretics before God. No schism had taken place, they were not a *dissenting body/ Wycliffe, though he was fighting the Church, liked to think that he was only converting it, and his followers scarcely knew where they stood. One of them, Hereford, after preaching Lollardy for several

¹ *Ant. Petitions*, 7099, P B. O. Translation In *MSS. Gott* Cleopatra*, E, ii. 201.